

Dragonshards

The Elves of Valenar, Part 1

By Keith Baker



The Darguul warlord studied Caerys, slowly spinning the chain of his flail. "What could bring you to this place, elf?" His tribe gathered around them, forming a wide circle of shadows and gleaming red eyes.

Caerys held her double blade in the falcon guard, level with her shoulders and spreading out like wings. "I came in search of legends. Ten thousand years ago Daealyth of Taeri stood this ground and faced your ancestors, and twenty fell before his singing blades. You are no Dhakaani of old, and a mere twenty of you will bring no honor to the Taeri."

The warlord hissed in fury, and his flail flashed in the firelight. The chain wrapped around Caerys' blade but she twisted away. The flail flew into the darkness. She spun forward, her double blade weaving a circle of fire as she danced toward the chieftain. In a moment the song of steel was over.

Caerys watched as the warlord fell to the ground. With a contemptuous snap of her wrist, she flicked the blood from her blade into the eyes of the stunned onlookers. She smiled behind her spirit veil, counting the blades arrayed against her.

"But forty will."

Heart and History

Born in the land of Xen'drik, the elves learned the ways of civilization and magic as slaves of the giants. Ultimately Xen'drik collapsed in an apocalypse of dragon fire, giant magic, and elven steel. The creatures remaining on the continent were reduced to savagery. During the final days of Xen'drik, a visionary foresaw the fate of the doomed realm. On the eve of destruction, she led a few thousand elves across the sea.

Those elves found a home on the island of Aerenal. While the elves came from different cultures, they were united by their reverence for their ancestors and the heroic deeds of those fallen in Xen'drik. The majority of the settlers chose to lay down the sword in favor of the book. They studied the art of magic, plumbing the depth of the arcane and the divine in their search for a way to preserve their heroes. Over the course of twelve thousand years, this effort produced the Undying Court and the Aereni.

Until the Last War, few humans knew of the other culture of Aerenal: The Tairnadal, "proud warriors." When news reached Aerenal of the destruction wrought by the dragons and the downfall of their ancient enemies, the Tairnadal refused to lay down their weapons. Some cursed the dragons for stealing their rightful victory while others blamed the wyrmes of Argonnessen for the deaths of elves left behind. While the Aereni sought a way to overcome death, Tairnadal priests declared that the spirits of departed heroes continued to live on through their descendants -- and that the warrior who gains glory in battle serves as an avatar for the heroes of the past.

In -25,000 YK, the dragons came to Aerenal. Once again all elves joined together against a common foe. The conflict between Argonnessen and Aerenal was a fascinating and mysterious struggle but it is a subject far too

deep for this current work. To the human eye, this war continued at a snail's pace, with centuries passing between battles. Slowly the emphasis shifted from physical conflict to magical warfare, with the greatest burden falling on the Undying Court itself. Temporarily freed from battle, the Tairnadal looked elsewhere for glory. Their eyes settled on Khorvaire.

In -10,000 YK, Cassael Vadallia led a troop of warriors to the southern coast of Khorvaire, where the Tairnadal established a presence on the continent. These elves called themselves the Valaes Tairn, "warriors of glory." As the elves spread across the southwest, they came into contact with the goblinoid empire of Dhakaan. Isolated skirmishes soon turned to war. The Valaes Tairn were peerless warriors but the Dhakaani had excellent discipline and greater numbers.

At the height of the Dhakaani-Tairn War, the dragons struck Aerenal with greater force than ever. The elves rushed to the defense of their homeland, and the goblins seized the fortresses left behind. The conflict that followed was long and terrible, made worse when the Dhakaani launched attacks against Aerenal. The elves could not afford to fight two foes. The leaders of the Tairnadal met with the Dhakaani, and a treaty was signed; the elves swore never to return to Khorvaire unless called upon for aid.

They stood by their word. The Dhakaani were too proud to ask for assistance during the Daelkyr incursion, and even when the empire collapsed into ruin the Tairnadal remained on their island. For thousands of years the Valaes Tairn rebuilt their numbers and honed their skills -- until 914 YK, when a summons finally came.

The call came from Queen Mishann of Cyre. The Last War was well underway, and the Cyrans were under attack from all sides. Intrigued by the queen's plea, war leader Shaeras Vadallia summoned the clans of the Valaes Tairn. The warriors agreed that it was time to return.

For 42 years the Valaes Tairn spread terror across Breland and Karrnath. Then they broke all ties with Cyre. Some say that the young Queen Mishala insulted Vadallia, while others believe that the war leader simply grew tired of the alliance. Vadallia summoned his forces to the southwestern edge of Cyre. He spoke of the ancient claim of the elves, a bond to the land older than human civilization. As a darkwood crown was placed upon his brow, he swore to restore the lands claimed by his ancestor and to give all Tairnadal the chance for glory. Sinking his blade into the soil, he declared the foundation of Valenar, "the glorious realm."

Next Week -- What it means to be Valenar.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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